DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 410 599 CS 509 548

AUTHOR Bunz, Ulla K.
TITLE Too Far To Go Home for the Weekend--A German Student in the United States of America: An Undergraduate Woman Student's Experience.
PUB DATE 1997-04-00
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southern States Communication Association (Savannah, GA, April 2-6, 1997).
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *College Students; *Cultural Differences; *Foreign Students; Higher Education; Individual Development; *Intercultural Communication; *Student Experience; Student Reaction; *Student Welfare
IDENTIFIERS Faculty Attitudes

ABSTRACT

International students from western European countries attending American universities often face severe culture shock in the areas of education and personal development. The four stages of culture shock are the honeymoon stage, crisis stage, recovery stage, and the adjustment stage. Culture shock can be overcome by finding out about the new culture, learning the basics of the language, observing carefully, tolerating differences, and developing flexibility. Educational shock comes from encountering differing educational systems, different power structures, and the need to use English 24 hours a day. Gaining new experiences and memories is an important step in overcoming culture shock and personal development shock. The majority of international students arrive in the United States without their family and have left their friends and natural support system behind. American ethnocentrism is one reason why undergraduate international and American students often do not make friends with each other. International communication majors are much more likely to overcome culture shock more easily and adjust to American ways less painfully. Members of the communication faculty are more likely to be concerned about international students because of their own research interests. There is no guarantee that culture shock will be overcome. Neither is there a guarantee that both Americans and international students will ever get used to each other's ways. (Contains 33 notes. Appendixes contain a story that contains hidden incidents that will seem normal to most Americans, but are strange for international students.) (RS)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 410 599

1997 SSCA Convention in Svannah

April 2-6, 1997

Too Far to go Home for the Weekend

A German Student in the United States of America: An Undergraduate Woman Student's Experience

Ulla K. Bunz

University of South Alabama

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

U. Bunz

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CS 505548

Ulla K. Bunz
Department of Communication
University of South Alabama
Mobile, AL 36688

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Table of Contents

1. Introduction ..... p. 1
2. The Four Stages of Culture Shock ..... p. 2
   - 2.1 The Honeymoon Stage ..... p. 2
   - 2.2 Crisis Stage ..... p. 3
   - 2.3 Recovery Stage ..... p. 4
   - 2.4 Adjustment Stage ..... p. 4
   - 2.5 Overcoming Culture Shock ..... p. 5
3. Educational Shock ..... p. 6
   - 3.1 Different Systems ..... p. 6
   - 3.2 Different Power Structures ..... p. 8
   - 3.3 ... And All That In English! ..... p. 8
4. Personal Development Shock ..... p. 9
   - 4.1 New Friends, No Family ..... p. 10
   - 4.2 The American Way ..... p. 11
5. Advantages of International Communication Majors ..... p. 12
   - 5.1 The Communication Family ..... p. 13
   - 5.2 The A-B-C of Intercultural Communication ..... p. 13
6. Summary ..... p. 14

References ..... p. 15

Appendix A - Test Your Intercultural Knowledge ..... p. 16

Appendix B - Solutions ..... p. 17

Introduction

International students who have come to the United States of America to study are driven by a variety of motivations. Some are fulfilling their childhood dreams. Some only want to get an education that will secure them better jobs in their home countries. Some might have had to flee their countries and didn't even want to come here. In all cases, these people have one thing in common. They are not U.S. Americans, and now have to adjust to life in the United States.

When moving to a new culture, people usually experience culture shock. No matter how good a person tries to prepare him or herself through for example, learning the language, the history and social norms of the targeted culture, theory and reality will not match in most cases. Some aspects of a culture, especially social values, can only be acquired through first hand experience. Even though preparation is important, the real learning process occurs through trial and error.

This paper focuses on international students from western European countries at U.S. American universities. These people often face severe culture shock in two main areas, education and personal development. To ensure a clear understanding of some of the problems these students face, first the four stages of culture shock in general will be explained. There will also be some guidelines that can help to deal with culture shock. In the following paragraphs examples of educational and personal development shock will be given. These examples are taken from personal experience. Therefore, they mostly derive from a comparison of German and U.S. American norms, values and beliefs.[1] The last paragraph will explain in which ways communication "majors" enjoy an advantage over students in other majors.

---

[1] In Appendix A you can test your own intercultural knowledge concerning these two cultures. Borrowing from a children's game I have created a story about who I am, how I came to Alabama, and what I am doing there. In this story there are incidents hidden that will seem normal to most U.S. Americans, but were strange for me. Try and see if you can identify some of these incidents! The solutions with explanations can be found in Appendix B

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2. The Four Stages of Culture Shock

The term "culture shock" can be read in two directions. First, a culture that is shocked. Second, a shock due to a culture. The second interpretation is the one most often used for a formal definition. Wilson (340), for example, defines culture shock as "a psychological reaction to the stress some people experience when they confront a culture very different form their own". The reason these people experience stress is that their own cultural beliefs are different from the ones they are exposed to. In short, their culture is shocked by the other culture.

Culture shock can occur when values, beliefs, and norms differ from the way a person is used to. Most tourists never experience culture shock, because they only spend a short time in the new culture. Also, tourists expect things to be different, while having the assurance that when they get home things will be normal again. International students, in contrast, get into close contact with the new culture over a long period of time. All international students undergo the same of the stages of culture shock to some extend.

2.1 The Honeymoon Stage

The honeymoon stage is the first to occur for most people. It is called "honeymoon", because everything is great. The new culture is overwhelming in a positive sense. The person ignores anything he or she might usually want to criticize. This stage can actually occur before a person even arrives in the new country. Most tourists never leave this stage, because they don't spend enough time in the country. The honeymoon stage can last several months, but it can also be over the second a person sets foot on the ground. Suddenly and without warning the person enters a new stage. Even knowing that this will probably happen does not prevent the miserable feelings of the crisis stage.

2.2 Crisis Stage

Just as for the honeymoon stage, the name "crisis stage" is self-explanatory. Before, the person loved everything. Now, the crisis occurs and the panel moves to the other extreme. The person hates everything. "The person is confused, perhaps disoriented, and feels isolated and lonely. Frustration and inadequacy become a common experience. Frustration may turn into defensiveness" (Wilson, 341). Sentences such as "Why did I leave all the great things at home to come to an awful place like this?" or "Nobody likes me here. I don't like anybody. I don't like anything here." are typical for the crisis stage. Self-doubt, self-pity, melancholy, and severe homesickness overwhelm the person. Now, nothing positive can be found about the new culture. The only solution seems to be to escape all this misery by going home.

Both the honeymoon and the crisis stage are very emotional. Rational thought is turned off. A person doesn't consider all the arguments in favor for coming here or staying. Many people, especially business people that have been prepared poorly by their companies and have arrived without their families, don't overcome the crisis stage. They go back to were they came from. International students, though, usually arrange themselves. They have come a long way from home. This distance cannot only be counted in miles. These students have left their families and friends, and often also secure financial states to pursue their education in a foreign country. Most international students have both a sense of adventure and courage. They are willing to risk. Therefore, they are also willing to give the new culture another chance. They start fighting their homesickness, which can last for months, and often returns repeatedly. Yet, the moment a person decides not to go home, he or she unconsciously enters a new stage.

2.3 Recovery Stage

During the recovery stage, extremes suddenly meet in the middle. Things no longer are unbelievably great or awful. The person discovers that he or she likes some things, and dislikes others, and that it is okay to feel that way. The homesickness might still be prevalent, but new experiences create new memories Language becomes important. "The person acquires enough social and linguistic skill to function effectively in the new culture" (Wilson, 341). The person now is able to converse more easily with the locals. He or she gains self-confidence which in turn leads to more acceptance. At this time latest, a daily routine usually is developed. Every-day tasks such as shopping for groceries have become a habit. Streets and places are more familiar. Many people constantly switch from honeymoon to crisis, only the stages are not as extreme as in the beginning anymore. The person now is able to see both cultures, the old and the new one, critically in a constructive way.

2.4 Adjustment Stage

During the adjustment stage, "the person adjusts comfortable to the new culture. (...) The experience of the culture as a whole becomes pleasant again" (Wilson, 341). This adjustment is more psychological than physical. During the recovery stage the person has made him or herself comfortable in the direct environment. This includes, for example, discovering favorite bars and dishes, or knowing one's way around town. During the adjustment stage, acquaintances become friends and the person considers the place he or she lives in as home. Support can be found in the immediate environment. Therefore, the phone bill decreases drastically because local calls are cheaper than long distance calls.

Not all people go through all four stages of culture shock. The order might differ too. Especially students who come to the United States planing only to achieve a university degree and then return home seldom adjust completely. But even those who fully adjust are not save from re-occurring culture shock or homesickness.

2.5 Overcoming Culture Shock

Many international students undergo a temporary loss of sense of direction. While they are in the foreign country, they often remember home. They might even get homesick. Usually, the excitement of going home for the first time after the move is great. While at home, these students discover that things in their home countries aren't as they remembered them. There are problems too. Suddenly, the students miss their new home, habits and friends just as much as they have missed their home country before. Many can't wait to return to the States, where they start missing home again.

To overcome culture shock more easily, there a five basic guidelines (Wilson, 342-345). First, find out as much as you can about the new culture. Talk to people who have been there, and do some research on history and local customs. Second, try to learn at least the basics of the culture's language. Even if you only speak a few words, people will always appreciate the effort. The better the language skills, the more likely an easy adjustment. Third, observe carefully once you arrive in the new culture. Learn from first hand experience, and never cease learning and asking for explanations. Fourth, tolerate differences. Especially when things turn out to be different as you expected, don't think your prejudices are right. Just because some people are different from the way you are used to, they are not inferior. Fifth, develop the flexibility to try something new. Adjustment becomes easier the more new experiences with the new culture are gained.

These guidelines can help both when being a short time tourist or a long term visitor in a new culture. Giving up one's own personal cultural background is not necessary in order to get accepted in the new culture. Usually, an open person adjusts automatically and naturally to the new culture. The degree of adjustment, and therefore, the degree of personal well-being and ability to overcome homesickness and culture shock, is higher the more open a person is.

3. Educational Shock

Entering a new school always means changes. International students entering the university system in the United States however, have to adjust in many aspects in addition to those American students have to get used to. Especially if the international has attended a university in his or her home country, the changes might be crucial. It is interesting to note that usually international students do extremely well at American universities. There are two possible explanations for this. First, the American system is easier, so students used to a more difficult level of education "get by" more easily. Second, international students work harder, because they have come a long way and made a major decision in leaving their home country.

In reality, probably both possibilities merge. Most European systems don't have multiple choice exams, which are fairly easy to pass once the student gets used to them. Also, textbooks with the important words in bold type face are very convenient to use after digging through library books trying to find out what is important about a theory. In addition to that, international students are aware that they are often paying double the tuition Americans are, and they naturally want to get most out of their money. Hard work though also means closer contact with the new system, and therefore a higher chance of suffering from educational culture shock. Three aspects of this specific culture shock will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

3.1 Different Systems

An important cultural difference international students have to deal with is the new educational system. This includes aspects such as quarter or semester system, class structure, scheduling and size, use of textbooks, examinations, grading, and university requirements.

A student from Germany is used to the semester system. The winter semester has 16 weeks, the summer semester has 12 weeks. Summer school does not exist. Classes

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

are usually two hours or four hours long. Night classes don't exist. Class size varies greatly and depends on course, major and university. Some classes are held in a lecture format with up to 500 students in business, or approximately 300 in many social sciences. Textbooks are used only in very few majors, such as Business, Law or Medicine. In these majors grades depend on examination. In the Humanities and Social Sciences the students are assigned a topic on which they do their own library research all semester long. They get their grades from a 20-90 minute presentation and a term paper summing up their research. Often, the student starts out with only one keyword such as "gatekeeper". Help is provided sparingly by the faculty, and most libraries are not yet fully computerized. Grades range from "1" to "6". A "4" is necessary to pass most classes and is equivalent to the U.S. American "C". This means that Germans can achieve a grade better than the American "A". A GPA doesn't exist either. Students only have to pass a certain amount of classes. The graduation grade is determined from the thesis and oral exams only. Usually, students choose one major and two minors. They don't take general introductory classes that take up more than a year in the United States. However, for all Humanities and Social Science majors their is one general requirement: Latin. This can be fulfilled through five years of Middle and Highschool Latin, or through a one year intensive course at university.[2]

These differences are taken from a U.S. American - German comparison. However, the educational systems in western Europe are more alike among each other than in comparison with the U.S. American one. Even though different countries might have specific differences, the example above shows the long list of educational differences students might have to deal with.

---

[2]This class is extremely tough. Attendance is not counted, because missing more than one class usually leaves the student too far behind to continue anyway. My class started out with almost 200 students. At the end of the year 26 graduated form the class. Average failure rates are over 80%.

3.2 Different Power Structures

Another aspect related to the different educational system is power structure. In many Asian countries, for example, students don't ask questions because this would imply doubting the teachers superiority. If the teacher makes an obvious mistake, the students will not tell him out of respect. Even if taking a western culture such as Germany, there are many power structure differences international students have to deal with.

One main point is related to names. In Germany, students are called Mr. and Mrs. plus their last name. The word "Miss" is related to age and not to status of being married or not. Therefore, "Miss" is no longer used for university students. Likewise, students always call their teachers by their last name and their highest degree. Lecturers with only a Master are called Mr./Mr. So-and-So. Teachers with Ph.D.'s are called Dr. So-and-So, and professors are called Professor So-and-So. This shows respect to the superior's accomplishments. On the other hand, Germans never call someone "Sir" or "Madam".

In the United States, professors are usually called Dr. So-and-So, and soon offer to be called by the first name. However, respect is shown by the use of "Sir" or "Madam". This is very confusing at first for an international student. A German student's respect, for example, easily decreases toward the Americans that break down power structures too easily. On the other hand, Americans might feel insulted if a European student doesn't use "Sir". Misunderstandings soon result that influence the relationship between the international and the American. Usually, these misunderstandings are not cleared up because people don't discuss power structures. Every person silently is supposed to know and obey them. International students, though, often are used to different power structures.

3.3 ... And All That In English!

The most important adjustment students have to undergo is the change of language. Many European students start learning English at the age of 11 or 12. However, even seven or eight years of school English are not sufficient preparation for a life in English.

Many colloquial terms are not taught in school. Neither are special terms in specific areas, for example business English. Often, learning a new word in class during studies in the United States actually means learning three or four for an international student, because the explanations and definitions for a new word are in English too, naturally.

Some students don't trust their own knowledge of the English language. They fear to be laughed at when making mistakes in the oral language. Therefore, they only talk when absolutely sure about what they want to say. Americans often don't understand this thought process, or are too impatient to wait for the student to "translate" mentally what he or she wants to say. This results in isolation of those students who need to be in contact with Americans most, so they can learn the language more easily by listening.

Also, many Americans don't realize how tiring it can be to talk in a foreign language all day long. True, international students mostly choose to come to the States, and therefore should be prepared to speak English. But especially at the beginning speaking a new language 24 hours a day is difficult, especially at the end of the day. Being laughed at for strange expressions, mistakes, or a strong accent is not encouraging but devastating.[3]

4. Personal Development Shock

Academic performance is often closely linked with personal adjustment. One major influence on a person's well-being is the relationship with the direct environment. When suddenly planted in a new environment, a person has to prove him or herself all over again. A personality has to be defended, or new traits need to be developed. Isolation and loneliness have to be turned into social involvement. Gaining new experiences and memories is an important step in overcoming culture shock and personal growth.

[3]I have developed an easy method to remind Americans of their snobbism. Whenever an American starts picking on me for mistakes I am making, or is smiling at my accent, I simply tell them that I should be delighted to continue the conversation the day they speak my language as good as I am speaking theirs. So far in all cases they apologized immediately and didn't repeat their behavior.

4.1 New Friends, No Family

The majority of international students arrive in the United States without their family. They also leave behind friends and the natural support system developed during the previous life. At first, this might feel like great freedom. Just as many Americans international students might consider the beginning of their university career as an escape from home. Latest during the crisis stage, this perception changes.

The importance of friends and family support is higher than one might think. In the new country the student is not only new and different, but also alone. Making new friends is the best way to compensate for this loss. Yet, making new friends is not always easy and takes time. Even friendly and open attitudes cannot compensate for years of close acquaintance. In some cases, though, the bonds between new friends soon become very strong. Especially international students who live on Campus often spend much time with each other, so the process of getting acquainted better is sped up. Over the weeks and months contact with old friends and family members decreases constantly to the same degree as the student adjusts to the new home. Many international students have a "best friend" in their home country, and a "best friend" at the university.[4]

In the process of making new friends there seems to be a difference between undergraduate and graduate international students. Graduate students usually get in close contact with Americans due to smaller classes, work experience and group projects. Also, graduate students often are older and seem to be less self-centered but more open to the new culture. Therefore, they make friends with Americans more easily. Undergraduates, on the other hand, usually make friends with other international students, especially with other internationals from their own country. Undergraduate classes are organized more individualistic than collectivistic. Also, many American undergraduates enter College with a set of friends they know from Highschool. Americans enter fraternities and sororities

[4]It is important to note that most European cultures are much more reserved than U.S. Americans. While U.S. Americans often have many good or best friends plus countless acquaintances, most Europeans prefer a small group of close friends. Moving from acquaintanceship to close friendship often is a process of several years. Also, most Europeans don't have more than one or two "best" friends in contrast to most U.S. Americans.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

and are interested in international students only to a very superficial degree. This results in an almost viscous circle. International students feel it to be easier to get to know other internationals. They don't try to get to know Americans. The Americans perceive a slight distance, especially during the difficult crisis stage internationals go through. Americans don't really understand this distance. They ask questions about the background of the international student. Often these questions seem naive and superficial to the international. If the international tries to get into more details about the own culture, Americans often are not willing to alter their prejudices. They insist on their superiority of knowledge about the international student's culture and country. This results in more distance on the side of the international student.

4.2 The American Way

International students all have something in common that separates them from most U.S. Americans. They have experience with at least two cultures. Nevertheless it sometimes is not easy to let go of one's own cultural identity and take over some habits of the new culture. Two aspects seem to be especially difficult: U.S. American perception of themselves and other cultures, and dating behavior.

Americans seem to have a lot of national pride. To an international student they often also seem to have a lot of ignorance. As explained in the previous paragraph, American ethnocentrism[5] is one of the reasons why undergraduate international and American students often don't make friends with each other. Being exposed to a foreign culture every day international students often develop more national pride for their home country than they had before. It is very provoking to be told by an American that he or she knows things better about an international student's home country than the international student him or herself. Unfortunately, this is how many Americans behave. They can't even understand that different perceptions of the same event exist. Especially concerning

[5]Ethnocentrism is the belief of one's own culture as superior to another (Lustig, 85).

historical questions many younger U.S. Americans need to develop more sensitivity. Asking a Slovak about communism or a German about Hitler is about as hot a topic as asking an American about Vietnam or the Civil War.

The second major problem in personal development international students have to get used to is American dating behavior. Intentional students often develop some prejudiced knowledge about American dating behavior through Hollywood movies. The reality, though, is much more scary for many. Most cultures, including western European cultures, place much emphasis on courtship. Dating is a long term activity. Americans progress rather fast. Often, the first couple of minutes American men meet an international woman they ask personal questions about boyfriends, and even might offer a date. Americans kiss sooner, and they often marry after a short time. Many Europeans smile at the American perception of having had a "long" relationship after dating for a year.[6] For many international students this faster approach to dating is not flattering but offending.[7] The American way of taking it easy and checking things out often offends the honor of a woman. Therefore, many internationals develop relationships either with other internationals or not at all.

5. Advantages of International Communication Majors

Among all international students there is one group with an advantage. International Communication "majors" are much more likely to overcome culture shock more easily and adjust to American ways less painfully. There are two reasons for this. First, the faculty and students in the Communication department are generally concerned with integrating international students as naturally and easily as possible. Second,

---

[6]I once got together with some other international students and created the dating cycle. We wrote down typical steps during U.S. American courtship, and during European courtship. It took us over two pages for the European cycle, while the American cycle only covered about 3/4 of a page.

[7]The movie "French Kiss" with Meg Ryan contrasts different courtship behaviors of Americans and French. Several scenes perfectly show the more teasing approach of the French, and the more direct approach of the Americans.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

communication students acquire many communication tools in classes that help to overcome culture shock and homesickness more easily.

5.1 The Communication Family

Members of the Communication faculty are more likely to be concerned about international students because of their own research interests. Intercultural Communication is a track that receives more and more attention. Also, new technologies have resulted in the "global village" image of the world which requires intercultural communication skills in almost every area, for example organizational, interpersonal, or tele- communication. Therefore, contact between faculty members and international students provides the researchers with first hand experiences with different cultures.

In addition to this rather selfish interest in international students, communication departments are more likely to work as an entity. The department can almost become a family replacement for the international student in terms of support, experience, and knowledge. Many of the culture shock problems can be resolved or lessened in degree through conversations with faculty members. Faculty members are more likely to be able to help through conversations because they already know and have experience with the communication tools a student learns in communication classes.

5.2 The A-B-C of Intercultural Communication

The A-B-C of intercultural communication consists of some basic tools acquired mainly in interpersonal classes. Knowing about the communication process, for example, helps to discover the points at which misunderstandings might occur. Knowing about clearing up misunderstandings helps to prevent major conflicts. Even if a conflict occurs, communication students are more likely to learn if it is a real conflict and how to solve it with a win-win solution. In addition, communication students are more likely to learn tolerance and develop an open orientation. Therefore, communication students in general

have an advantage over other students that are educated in a much more competitive way, such as for example, business or engineering students.

International communication students in specific are able to apply all theoretical concepts straight away. When they learn about the stages of culture shock, they also realize that the crisis stage will not last forever, as it seemingly does. They will learn that it is okay to be different, and that a difference in worldview or opinion not necessarily means that one person is right and the other wrong.

6. Summary

This paper has started out with a general explanation of culture shock. Then, two areas in which culture shock can occur have been discussed in specific, education and personal development. Hopefully, through reading this paper the reader has already developed some sensitivity for the problems international students face at U.S. American universities.

Logically, these problems and their extend vary greatly, because every international student first of all is a human being with personal flaws, problems, and opinions. Tools U.S. Americans should try to acquire to be able to deal with international students more effectively include tolerance, openness, and patience. Again, the degree to which a person can develop these traits depend on the person's personality. As usual in interaction of two people relativity and uncertainty make up a great part of their interaction. There is no guarantee that culture shock will be overcome. Neither is there a guarantee that both U.S. Americans and international students will ever get used to each other's ways. However, without trying, chances of overcoming cultural differences are almost null.

To conclude this paper I would like to remind the reader of one fact so obvious that most of us forget about it all the time: If you go some place else, you will be different, because we are all foreigners almost everywhere in the world.

References

Lustig, Myron W. and Jolene Koester (1996): Intercultural Competence. Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures. Second Edition. New York: HarperCollins.

Wilson, Gerald L., Alan M. Hantz and Michael S. Hanna (1995): Interpersonal Growth Through Communication. Fourth Edition. Dubuque, Iowa: Brown & Benchmark.

Appendix A

Test Your Intercultural Knowledge

The Story of my Life Time - A Mystery in Itself

(Find the Incidents)

I was born in Bonn, Germany. After a few months, my family moved to Brussels, Belgium because my father started a new job. I attended the German School of Brussels, and after graduating from Highschool at the age of 19 I moved to Germany. For three years I studied publicism and communication. During my summer internship after the second year I started researching universities in the south of the United States. My letters of inquiry mostly resulted in instantaneous answers. Finally, in December I mailed of my application forms. In late February I received a letter from the Office of International Services telling me that my application to the Graduate School had to be declined. One phone call and about three weeks later I finally received my letter of admissions, together with an application for the dormitories. About one year after my first inquiry I boarded an airplane and started my trip to Mobile, AL. I entered the United States for the first time in my life on a hot September afternoon 1995.

Since then, many things have happened. Every quarter I have been able to get the classes I needed during registration. Together with my advisor Mike I developed a clear schedule of classes for more than a year in advance. In March 1997 I graduated with a GPA of 3.95. Soon afterwards I received my diploma stating that I was awarded the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.). Since the University of South Alabama only organizes commencement ceremonies in December and June, I didn't walk. However, I bought myself a graduation ring.

On the relationship level I have found many new friends. It hasn't been easy at first to get to know Americans. Living in the dorms I was able to watch other students move in their double rooms with the help of their pickup trucks full of possessions. Mostly, the whole family was there to help. I was able to talk to many people and soon was asked out

on dates. Still, it was easier to get along with other internationals. Even though we are very different personality types, we all have one thing in common. Can you guess what it is?

26 incidents

Appendix B

Solution

I was born in Bonn, Germany. After a few months, my family moved to Brussels, Belgium because my father started a new job. I attended the German School of Brussels, and after graduating from **Highschool**[8] at the age of **19**[9] I moved to Germany. For three years I studied publicism and communication. During my **summer internship**[10] after the second year I started researching universities in the south of the United States. My letters of inquiry mostly resulted in **instantaneous answers**[11]. Finally, in December I mailed of my **application forms**[12]. In late February I received a letter from the Office of International Services telling me that my application to the **Graduate School**[13] had to be declined. One phone call and about three weeks later I finally received my letter of

[8]The German school system is divided differently. The most common branch is the one leading to the graduation exam "Abitur", which is needed to attend College. This branch is called "Gymnasium" and starts in 5th grade. Even though a word like Highschool exists for the last three years, it is never used. Instead, students simply say the year they are in and the branch if necessary.

[9]The German system consists of 13 school years. Therefore, students are usually 19 when they graduate. Germany is the only country I am aware of that has 13 years. When coming to the United States, Germans get College credit for this additional year in school.

[10]Summer school doesn't exist. Also, internships are very normal in Germany to collect experience and make connections. Many Americans don't even bother to gain any experience and then are surprised they can't find a well paid job.

[11]Service is slower at German institutions. Universities charge basically no tuition. At my university we paid $100 per semester, which included free public transportation and health insurance. This also means, that no one really bothers about your requests. If you get an answer from a university, it'll take a while.

[12]You don't need to apply to universities in general. You just go and register. Only for specific majors such as business, law, medicine, and since recently communication you have to undergo a special selection. You will be accepted depending on Highschool graduation grade.

[13]In Germany you can get either a diploma, a state diploma, or a master's degree. There is no Bachelor. Therefore, their is no division between undergraduate and graduate.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

admissions, together with an application for the **dormitories**[14]. About one year after my first inquiry I boarded an airplane and started my **trip**[15] to Mobile, AL. I entered the United States for the **first time**[16] in my life on a **hot September**[17] afternoon 1995.

Since then, many things have happened. Every **quarter**[18] I have been able to get the classes I needed during **registration**[19]. Together with my **advisor**[20] **Mike**[21] I developed a clear **schedule of classes**[22] for more than a year in advance. In March 1997 I graduated with a **GPA**[23] of **3.95**[24]. Soon afterwards I received my diploma stating that I was awarded the **Bachelor of Arts**[25] (B.A.). Since the University of South Alabama only organizes **commencement ceremonies**[26] in December and June, I didn't walk. However, I bought myself a **graduation ring**[27].

On the relationship level I have found many new friends. It hasn't been easy at first to get to know Americans. Living in the dorms I was able to watch other students move in

---

[14] Most universities are not Campus universities. If dorms exist at all, they belong to the state. You have to obtain applications from a different agency, not from the university.

[15] For most west Europeans this trip takes about 16-20 hours. Time difference between central U.S. and Europe is 6-8 hours. Airplane tickets cost several hundreds of dollars.

[16] I traveled a lot, but never to the USA before. Many Americans don't realize that international students actually are from a different continent, and not only another state.

[17] It's getting cold in September at home. In the middle of September average day temperatures are around 55F. In Alabama it's about 85F.

[18] Semester system in Germany, and no summer school.

[19] Only very few classes such as the mandatory Latin require registration in advance. Usually, you just show up the first day early enough in the hope to find an empty seat.

[20] There are no advisors in Germany. You have to find out yourself which classes and how many you need to graduate. You can try to talk to a professor, but you need to make an appointment and show up at least an hour before the office hour to stand in line with all the others. If you're lucky, you get whole five minutes with only one or two interruptions.

[21] Power structures are different. Calling a professor by the first name is disrespectful. Students are called Mr. or Mrs. plus their last name. First name bases usually takes a long time and represents a stage beyond simple acquaintance.

[22] You can't schedule your classes for more than the next semester in advance, because the classes offered differ every semester. Professors simply decide what they are interested in, and then offer a class. Most of the time classes are never offered twice. No catalogues exist therefore.

[23] We have grades, but they don't really count. You only need to pass your classes. You are self responsible for your progress. Graduation grades are determined by the thesis and oral exams only.

[24] Our grades range from 1-6, with 1 being the best. You need a four to pass a class, which transfers into an American "C".

[25] The B.A. doesn't exist. We go for the Master right away.

[26] There are no commencement ceremonies, no "walking", or robes. You pass your exams, go home and party. You get your diploma by mail.

[27] I have never heard of a graduation ring. Most universities don't have all these T-shirt, stickers, and logos. It took me over two years to find out my university had a sticker, and another three months to find it.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

their **double rooms**[28] with the help of their **pickup trucks**[29] full of **possessions**[30]. Mostly, the **whole family**[31] was there to help. I was able to talk to many people and soon was asked out on **dates**[32]. Still, it was easier to get along with other internationals. Even though we are very different personality types, we all have one thing **in common**[33]. Can you guess what it is?

[28]The dormitories that exist are all single rooms. Mostly, 10-15 students share a bathroom, though, and usually this bathroom is co-ed.

[29]I have seen Jeeps in Europe, but trucks still amuse me.

[30]International students arrive with two suitcases at most. It is kind of scary to watch people carrying in stuff for hours into one small room. Internationals usually can only bring clothes and maybe a few photographs and CD's.

[31]College seems to be a family thing in the states. Everybody is there to help little Joe or Jenny. In Germany, students tend to go far away from home to gain new experiences.

[32]They ask you out on a date five minutes after they met you! I'm used to courtship that takes a long time and is very complicated. Besides, you usually first go for a coffee together before you go on your first official date.

[33]We have in common that we are not American. Somehow, it seems easier to overcome intercultural differences between different foreign cultures than between the guest and the host culture. We are united by being different.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE